

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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For Immediate Release
Thursday, March 15, 2007

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Mayor Menino, BPS officials surprise 3rd grade student with “Absolutely Incredible Kid” prize

BOSTON – On national *Absolutely Incredible Kids Day*[™], Mayor Thomas M. Menino, Superintendent Michael Contompasis and School Committee Chair Elizabeth Reilinger paid a surprise visit today to the Louis Agassiz Elementary School in Jamaica Plain to congratulate the winner of the first Boston Public Schools “Absolutely Incredible Kid” contest.

Students and staff at the school believed they were attending an assembly this morning about a technology announcement. Instead, the Mayor and district officials called to the stage nine-year-old **Brenda Tejada-Baez**, a third grade Agassiz student, to receive a citation and prize package in honor of her selection as Boston’s “Absolutely Incredible Kid” before a packed auditorium of her teachers and classmates.

Brenda was selected from among nearly 100 nominations submitted by teachers, parents, and community members. She was nominated by her current teacher, Barbara Feeney, and her former teacher, Mary O’Brien. A year ago, Brenda and her family (mother Dolores and 4-year-old brother Michael) became homeless and moved into a shelter in Worcester. For three months, Brenda and her mother commuted daily by train from Worcester, beginning their trip at 6:00 a.m. every day. Mrs. O’Brien wrote, “Brenda always came to school with a smile on her face and a ready-to-work attitude.” The family eventually moved into a shelter in Dorchester. Soon thereafter, Brenda had an emergency appendectomy at Children’s Hospital but kept up with her school work while recovering. Several months ago, one week before Christmas, Brenda and her family moved into an apartment across the street from the school.

When she entered the Agassiz in kindergarten, Brenda spoke no English. She was in a Sheltered English Immersion classroom until this year, when she was mainstreamed to a regular education classroom because of her progress in speaking, reading, and writing in English. Brenda recently placed second out of 120 students in the Agassiz Spelling Bee. Wrote Mrs. O’Brien about Brenda, “She is a role model for all of us.”

Mayor Menino said, “We are so proud of Brenda and her family for their perseverance and hard work. Through all of their struggles, they have made education a top priority. Brenda sets an outstanding example of what we can all achieve if we stay focused and don’t give up.”

“Today, we proudly honor Brenda and many other ‘absolutely incredible kids’ in the Boston Public Schools,” said Dr. Reilinger. “Throughout Boston, there are countless stories of remarkable young people who overcome great odds to achieve personal and academic excellence. We congratulate them and all of the adults in their lives who support and encourage them along the way.”

“The stories about these students are truly inspiring,” said Superintendent Contompasis. “Too often, urban public school students are stereotyped or disparaged. This celebration is a great opportunity for us to pay tribute to a small sample of the outstanding young men and women in the Boston Public Schools. Today, we have 57,000 reasons to be very proud.”

Brenda’s prize package includes:

- \$200 Target gift card;
- two autographed copies of David Ortiz’s memoir, *Big Papi: The Story of How My Baseball Dreams Came True*, and an opportunity to meet him at a book signing, donated by Barnes & Noble;
- two-week pass to Camp Ponkawissett, a summer day camp in Milton, donated by Camp Fire USA of Eastern Massachusetts;
- two tickets to a Red Sox game and four tickets to a Boston Duck Tour from Mayor Menino;
- backpack and school supplies donated by the Boston Public Schools Homeless Initiative;
- \$20 gift card, books, and tote bags donated by Border’s;
- school supplies donated by Staples;
- new gold George Washington one-dollar coins donated by Weber Shandwick;
- “Absolutely Incredible Kids Day” merchandise – T-shirt, sticker, badge, mug;
- City of Boston baseball hat and baseball donated by the Mayor’s Office of Special Events and Tourism.

The teachers who nominated Brenda each will receive a \$100 Target gift card, as well as books, school supplies, and other prizes. The prize committee also identified six students who deserve “honorable mention” and will also receive prizes:

- **Enrico Joseph** is a junior at the Parkway Academy of Technology and Health (PATH) in the West Roxbury Education Complex. A year and a half ago, he was the victim of an attack that left him in a coma for five months and now confined to an electric wheelchair with very limited mobility on the right side of his body. The tragic experience helped Enrico transform his life, both personally and academically. During his first two years of high school, Enrico earned mostly Cs and Ds in his courses, but is now earning As and Bs in order to pursue his goal of going to college. “With all that he has endured, and all that he faces in the future,” wrote the aide who works with him, “he always can be found flashing his infectious smile and looking at the brighter side of life.”
- **Kristeon Mesa** admits that he was not always the best behaved student at the Winthrop Elementary School in Dorchester. Now in third grade, Kristeon has astounded his teachers, administrators and classmates alike with his transformation from a student frequently sent to the principal’s office for disciplinary reasons to “a classroom and school-wide role model for other students to look up to,” according to his teacher. Kristeon is committed to excelling academically, particularly in his favorite subject of Mathematics, and participates in tutoring and several other after-school programs. At home, Kristeon assists his father, who suffers from chronic illness. Wrote his teacher, “While the unfortunate circumstances may have caused some students to give up, act out, and to feel as though nothing could go right, Kristeon Mesa chose to do the exact opposite: achieve, excel, and persevere.”

- **Adryonna Montgomery**, a seventh grader at Mildred Avenue Middle School in Mattapan, recently returned to school after emergency surgery to operate on a brain tumor. Over the past several months, Adryonna has undergone extensive in-patient and outpatient rehabilitation to overcome post-operative complications such as difficulty eating, double vision, and some speech difficulties. Through it all, she was determined to get back to school, where she has been an honors student. According to her school nurse, “She should be exhausted from all the physical changes her body has undergone, but nothing seems to deter Adryonna from getting on with the goals she set for herself. She is always up for a challenge.”
- **Tibisay Pena**, an eighth grade student at the Cleveland Middle School in Dorchester, is described by her teacher as “simply an amazing young woman.” Coming from a home where very little English is spoken, Tibisay struggles to write and speak in English, but she perseveres every day and maintains an A or B grade average. About three years ago, her mother died of a sudden illness, requiring Tibisay to take on many responsibilities at home to support her father and two brothers. “I have never seen Tibisay give way to pressure from her friends to do things she knows are wrong. She has her head on straight in knowing what she needs to do to make it in life ... She handles her anger and sadness with a level of maturity far beyond her years.”
- **Anthony “D.J.” Ramos**, a fifth grade student at the Blackstone Elementary School in the South End, has Dwarfism Syndrome but, according to his teacher, “has the personality of Michael Jordan.” At 36 inches tall, Anthony inspires classmates and adults alike with his determination and positive outlook. He has set ambitious personal and academic goals for himself as he prepares for the transition to middle school. His teacher wrote that Anthony “has given each child that he has met the gifts of tolerance and acceptance, as well as the knowledge that anyone can do anything, despite his or her limitations.”
- **Angelina Rodriguez** entered Boston Community Leadership Academy (BCLA) in Brighton as a special education student determined to enter the academic mainstream. Today, in her senior year, Angelina is enrolled entirely in regular education classes and is on track to go to college, where she hopes to pursue a career in sociology. Her art teacher describes her as an “assistant teacher” who “challenges herself to do the most complex projects and yet finds time to assist others,” noting her particular skill in computer graphics. Her teacher wrote, “Angelina is a treasure to be with and will light the way for anyone who is lucky enough to work with her.”

March 15, 2007, marks the 11th Annual “Absolutely Incredible Kids Day”TM sponsored by Camp Fire USA, when adults across the country write letters to children and find other ways to tell the young people in their lives how special and important they are. This is the first time that the Boston Public Schools has participated in the day.

*The **Boston Public Schools** serves nearly 57,000 pre-kindergarten through grade 12 students in 145 schools. The district recently won the Broad Prize for Urban Education as the top city school district in the country. For more information, visit www.bostonpublicschools.org.*